**ECC Analysis: Executive Summary**

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The [Electronic Core Collection (ECC)](https://libraries.calstate.edu/ecc-faq/) was established in 1999 to leverage the CSU’s consortial buying power and provide equal access for all CSU students to a core set of resources. It currently contains 26a resources, and costs about $5.5 million/year. All but five resources provide full text. In response to budget pressures, COLD’s Electronic Resources committee (EAR) conducted a two-part evaluation of the ECC: 1) A 2018 multi-campus survey of perceived importance and 2) An in-depth, multi-year usage analysis.b The usage analysis was done by EAR member Tracy Gilmore (Long Beach) on a consultancy basis and reviewed by an EAR subcommittee. In addition, Tracy created templates to facilitate similar, annual analyses in the future.

**Table 1: Broadly Used and Highly Rated**

* *ABI Inform (Business)*
* *Academic Search Premier / Business Source Premier*
* *Academic Complete eBooks*
* *CINAHL Complete (Health)*
* *Communication & Mass Media Complete*
* *Global Newsstream*
* *JSTOR (13 collections)*
* *PsycArticles*
* *PsycInfo*
* *Sociological / Social Services Abs.*

**Results**

Table 1 lists the 10 resources that were both highly ratedc in the survey and have broad use across campuses.d They cost approximately $3.7 million in 2018-2019 and represent 78% of the total downloads and 55% of the total searches. *MLA* (humanities) and *Safari* (tech e-books), costing $380,000, were also highly rated, but the distribution of usage across campuses was more uneven.e

In total, patrons viewed or downloaded more than 9 million articles and other items on average annually in the 21 full-text databases, and there were more than 10 million searches in the remaining five databases. Overall, the median, three-year cost/use for full-text resources ranges from $0.08 for *ABI Inform* to $3.46 for *Mergent*, both business databases.f For resources that are not full-text, the median three-year cost/search ranged from $0.05 for *PsycInfo* to $0.42 for *MLA International Bibliography*.

The most used full-text resource, which also is the most expensive, is a multi-disciplinary, four-database EBSCO package that we refer to as *Academic Search Premier / Business Source Premier (ASP/BSP)*. Nine campuses augment this package with a mixture of upgrades, so it is very complex to evaluate. It costs about $1 million, accounts for an annual average of 3.5 million full-text downloads, and 20 campuses rated it as “Essential.” While its median cost-per-download of $0.28indicates a good return on investment,g we believed it merited extra analysis to learn the relative value of its various components. We could not completely evaluate each of the components to the level desired, however, because EBSCO does not provide complete title-level data. While EBSCO considers *Business Source Premier* to be “complementary,” it is possible to mix and match the four component databases with varying price points. Usage of the four databases is not evenly distributed: 59% of the total usage that the ECC pays for comes from titles unique to the lowest tier database, *Academic Search Elite*, 25% from titles unique to *Academic Search Premier*, 12% from *Business Source Elite*, and 4% from *Business Source Premier*. h

Also of note,the second most expensive ($720,775) and the highest rated package, *JSTOR* (comprised of 13 collections), had a three-year annual average of almost 785,000 downloads giving it an average $0.92 cost/download. However, this average was significantly affected by 1.8 million downloads recorded for 2017. Averaging just 2016 and 2018, the average cost per download would be $2.64.

Five resources declined in use: *America History & Life, Global Newsstream, PsycInfo, PsycArticles* and *Safari*. In addition, GenderWatch and *Ethnic Newswatch* had a decline in searches, but increases in downloads. The declines in searches may reflect a switch in user searching behavior from the databases to Primo’s OneSearch discovery tool. For *PsycArticles* and *Safari,* the decline may have been affected by a lag in activating resources in Primo Central Index. Downloads from *Academic Search Premier/Business Source Premier* doubled in 2018, which we could not explain.

*Biological Abstracts* was not able to be accurately evaluated; the vendor, Clarivate, was unable to distinguish usage between *Biological Abstracts* (part of the ECC) and the *BIOSIS* upgrade/opt-in products subscribed to by several campuses. In addition, the statistics Clarivate did provide were so low and confusing that we could not trust them. As an abstract database, the preferred metric would generally be searches, which is not what they provided. *MathSciNet* was evaluated based on the total cost, which is partially paid by the ECC and mostly paid by 15 campuses. We did not evaluate *SCOAP3*.

**Conclusion**

The multi-campus survey and multi-year cost-per-use analysis together show evidence of high system-wide value of the resources noted in Table 1. But most ECC resources have a cost-per-use (at least 17 resources having a cost/download or cost/search of $1 or less) that indicates these resources provide a high return on investment for the California State University system.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

ROI data such as cost-per-use is a critical element in evaluating and recommending digital library collections. In addition, broad usage and relevance to common curriculum across the system are equally important factors in evaluating the Electronic Core Collection.

This subcommittee makes the following recommendations:

* A staff member be identified, either at the Chancellor’s Office or a CSU library, to complete annual cost-per-use analyses for all ECC resources using the templates provided in this report, to support the EAR Committee and COLD in assessing the CSU’s shared digital content.
* The EAR committee recommend guidelines for the role of cost-per-use data in subscription and cancellation decisions for the ECC.
* To guide subscription and cancellation decisions for the ECC, the EAR committee should develop more detailed guidelines and definitions than currently available regarding the definition of “core” curriculum and digital content for the CSU system and to provide context and scope not addressed by system-wide, cost-per-use data.
* COLD, EAR, and CO staff lobby the appropriate vendors to provide the data necessary for assessment of *Bio Abstracts, Academic Search Premier/Business Source Premier*, and *Academic Complete eBooks*. Also, *JSTOR and ASP/BSP* usage should be monitored closely given the outlier data on these resources.

aCounts all 13 *JSTOR* subscriptions as one resource.

b Cost per download or full-text view was the metric for all but five, index-only resources, for which cost per search was used. The [detailed reports](https://csulb-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/personal/tracy_gilmore_csulb_edu/EoB31xSTxjtHvG1MN_RDOcMB2ikaJVxGtMOx_QzYGwg6Xw?e=U2yTuN) provides cost/use for each campus and each resource, plus the system-wide average and median. Campus costs came from the Chancellor’s Office or were imputed using student FTEs from 2016-2017. Usage is a 3-year average (2016-2018), unless otherwise noted.

cAt least 15 campuses rated each of these resources as “essential.” For an earlier EAR presentation in March 2019, we considered highly rated to be when 13 campuses said a resource was “essential.” We later raised the threshold to 15, as a stronger indicator. The two resources that were dropped from Table 1 were America History & Life, rated as essential by 14 campuses and Project Muse rated as essential by 13 campuses.

dBroadly used means that all campuses had usage (with occasional exception of Maritime) and that 80% or more campuses had a share of usage representing at least half of its proportion of FTEs.

eFour campuses dominated the MLA usage, and five campuses had less than 40% of their proportion of FTEs. With Safari, four campuses had usage at least twice their proportion of FTEs, and five campuses had usage less than 40% of their proportion of FTEs.

fThis does not include Biological Abstracts, which has a higher cost/use because of data irregularities related to BIOSIS opt-in subscriptions.

g Because usage includes that for titles in the upgraded packages (Academic Search Complete/Ultimate and/ or Business Source Complete/Ultimate) but because the costs for the upgrade opt-ins were not included, the cost/use shown is lower than it would be for what’s included in the ECC-paid package only.

hMost of the usage in this package is journal articles, but business librarians point to the value of non-journal material in *Business Source Premier*. EBSCO has been unable to provide BSP usage data in a format that allows for title-level analysis of non-journal titles by campus. Additionally, EBSCO’s lack of title-level unique identifiers (ISSNs) for many titles hinders value assessment of the individual databases in this package.